

## Message Text

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ORIGIN EPA-04

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ADP-00 AID-20 CEQ-02 CIAE-00 COA-02

COME-00 DODE-00 EB-11 INR-10 IO-13 L-03 NSF-04 NSC-10

NSAE-00 PM-07 RSC-01 SCI-06 SS-15 PA-03 PRS-01 USIA-12

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DRAFTED BY: EPA/AI/WHMANSFIELD/LGEBHARD

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EPA/REGION 5:RZELLER

CEQ:RSTRELOW

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SCI/EN/GKULICK

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMCONSUL CALGARY

AMCONSUL HALIFAX

AMCONSUL MONTREAL

AMCONSUL QUEBEC

AMCONSUL ST JOHNS

AMCONSUL TORONTO

AMCONSUL VANCOUVER

AMCONSUL WINNIPEG

UNCLAS STATE 129204

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SENV, CA

SUBJECT: ASBESTOS FIBERS IN LAKE SUPERIOIR

1. ON BASIS OF RECENT STUDIES BY EPA'S NATIONAL WATER  
QUALITY LABORATORY, EPA ON JUNE 15 ANNOUNCED THAT HIGH  
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CONCENTRATIONS OF ASBESTOS FIBERS HAVE BEEN DISCOVERED IN

THE DRINKING WATER SUPPLIES OF DULUTH AND SEVERAL NEARBY COMMUNITIES ON THE MINNESOTA SHORE OF LAKE SUPERIOR, WHICH DRAW THEIR DRINKING WATER FROM THE LAKE. THE SOURCE OF THESE FIBERS IS BELIEVED TO BE THE DISCHARGE OF TACONITE TAILINGS BY THE RESERVE MINING CO., SILVER BAY, MINN. WHILE THERE IS NO CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE THAT A HEALTH HAZARD EXISTS, EPA BELIEVES PRUDENCE DICTATES THAT AN ALTERNATIVE WATER SUPPLY SHOULD BE PROVIDED FOR VERY YOUNG CHILDREN.

2. THE GOVERNMENTS INVOLVED ARE TAKING IMMEDIATE STEPS TO ASSESS POSSIBLE HEALTH EFFECTS AND CONTROL MEASURES. ON JUNE 20, PRESIDENT NIXON APPOINTED CEQ CHAIRMAN RUSSELL TRAIN TO COORDINATE ALL FEDERAL EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE ASBESTOS PROBLEM IN DULUTH. TRAIN CALLED CANADIAN ENVIRONMENT MINISTER JACK DAVIS TO OUTLINE U.S. EFFORT ON JUNE 21. EPA REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR FRANCIS MAYO HAS BEEN ON THE SCENE MOST OF THE TIME SINCE JUNE 16, AND HAS BEEN IN INFORMAL CONTACT WITH CANADIAN COUNTERPARTS.

3. CONSULTATIONS HAD BEEN HELD WITH A NUMBER OF MEDICAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERTS INCLUDING DR. IRVING SELIKOFF OF MT. SINAI HOSPITAL IN NEW YORK CITY, A RESEARCH SPECIALIST IN THE FIELD OF CANCER ASSOCIATED WITH EXPOSURE TO ASBESTOS. HEALTH EFFECTS OF INGESTION OF ASBESTOS NOT YET CLEAR. HOWEVER, CANCER KNOWN TO BE CAUSED BY INHALATION OF HIGH LEVELS OF ASBESTOS FIBERS. TO OBTAIN FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS PROBLEM, EPA HAS CONTRACTED WITH DR. SELIKOFF TO DETERMINE THE EXTENT OF ACCUMULATION OF ASBESTOS FIBERS IN THE TISSUE OF RESIDENTS OF THE AREA. TISSUE SAMPLES ARE BEING OBTAINED FROM AUTOPSY SAMPLES RETAINED BY HOSPITAL PATHOLOGY DEPARTMENTS. THE RESULTS OF DR. SELIKOFF'S TISSUE STUDIES ARE EXPECTED IN TWO TO THREE WEEKS. THESE MAY OR MAY NOT PROVE CONCLUSIVE, AND IT IS PREMATURE TO CONJECTURE AT THIS TIME WHAT FURTHER ACTIONS MAY BE REQUIRED.

4. EPA HAS ESTABLISHED A FIELD OPERATIONS CENTER AT ITS DULUTH LAB TO CONDUCT AN EXTENSIVE WATER AND AIR SAMPLING PROGRAM, AND TO INVESTIGATE THE EFFICIENCY OF WATER TREATMENT EQUIPMENT IN REMOVING THE FIBERS AND THE AVAILABILITY OF ALTERNATIVE WATER SUPPLIES. AIR AND WATER QUALITY INVESTIGATIONS

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ARE BEING COORDINATED AMONG EPA, MINNESOTA PCA, FDA AND THE MUNICIPALITIES INVOLVED, WITH COOPERATION OF RESERVE MINING.

5. A NUMBER OF OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES ARE CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES AS NEEDED, COORDINATED THROUGH THE CHICAGO FEDERAL REGIONAL COUNCIL. ALSO, THE MINNESOTA POLLUTION CONTROL AGENCY (PCA) DIRECTED GRANT MERRITT ITS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO EXPLORE WITH RESERVE MINING CO. THE VOLUNTARY COMPLETE SHUTDOWN

OF THE PLANT DURING A REGULARLY SCHEDULED 50 PERCENT MAINTENANCE SHUTDOWN THIS SUMMER.

6. PACKAGED WATER FROM THE SUPERIOR, WISCONSIN, WELL SUPPLY IS BEING PROVIDED TO RETAIL OUTLETS BY THE DAIRIES IN DULUTH, IN QUANTITIES SUFFICIENT TO SUPPLY THE ESTIMATED PRE-SCHOOL POPULATION OF 8,000 TO 10,000 CHILDREN. THE AFFECTED NORTH SHORE COMMUNITIES HAVE DECIDED NOT TO PROVIDE ALTERNATE SUPPLIES PENDING FURTHER MEDICAL RECOMMENDATIONS.

7. EMBASSY MAY WISH TO INFORM CANADIAN OFFICIALS OF THESE ACTIVITIES. POSTS WILL BE KEPT ADVISED OF OUTCOME AND ANY SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS AS THEY OCCUR. RUSH

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